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Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee Public Hearing, Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Testimony In Support of HB 5300 requiring legislative approval for the merger or closing of state colleges and universities and prohibits the consolidation of the community colleges.

Thank you members of the Higher Ed and Employment Advancement Committee.

I'm John McNamara from New Britain. I worked for 22 years until last month as Capital Community College's grants and development officer and have been a member of the Congress of CT Community Colleges, 4Cs, the faculty and staff union.

I urge your support of HB 5300 that requires a two-thirds vote of the Board of Regents, empowers the General Assembly to authorize any closings or mergers of the state colleges and universities and prohibits the consolidation of the community-technical colleges.

The bill is urgently needed to provide appropriate checks and balances on the current consolidation move by the Board of Regents to turn 12 accredited community colleges into CT State Community College.

The original and continuing rationale for the one college consolidation has always been that the system had too many deans and too much bureaucracy; that more resources should go to student facing services and supports to help improve retention and graduation rates. Why then, in consideration of my job functions at Capital, is a hands-on manager and grant writer being replaced by a Dean of Advancement? Reductions of front-line staff, including essential financial aid personnel on the campuses, are occurring as a too big to fail bureaucracy, a second system office, is being created with money diverted to dozens of positions far removed from where teaching and learning is going on. At a minimum it's incumbent on the BOR and OPM to work together to make "one college" spending more transparent as campus budgets face growing deficits and higher tuitions because of enrollment challenges.

I also support shared services across campuses, seamless transfers and guided pathways at our community colleges. But I believe all of these benefits could be accomplished without the unchecked and risky investments now being made into a Connecticut State Community College. At their best CT community colleges are responsive to local economic and employment needs and they need the autonomy to remain so.

I urge a favorable report on HB 5300.

Thank you.